



DEWEY SQUARE GROUP

**CONSTITUENT SERVICES REPORT
SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL-MAYOR GOVERNMENT TRANSITION PROCESS
MAY 31, 2005**

CHARTER SECTION 265 (B)(9)

[The Mayor has] *"sole authority to dismiss the City Manager without recourse;"*

CHARTER SECTION 270 (G)

"No member of the Council shall directly or indirectly by suggestion or otherwise attempt to influence or coerce the City Manager or other officer appointed or confirmed by the Council in the making of any appointment to, or removal from, any City office or employment, or the purchase of any supplies, or discuss directly or indirectly with any candidate for City Manager the matter of appointments to City Offices or employment, or attempt to exact any promises from such candidate relative to any such appointments."

CHARTER SECTION 270 (H)

"Except for the purpose of inquiry or communications in furtherance of implementing policies and decisions approved by resolution or ordinance of the Council, individual members of Council shall deal with the administrative service for which the Mayor is responsible only through the Mayor, the City Manager, or the Mayor's designees."

CHARTER SECTION 270 (I)

"Any City official or department head in the administrative service may be summoned to appear before the Council or any committee of the Council to provide information or answer any question."

INTRODUCTION

DSG's report on constituent services is unlike other reports to date because, as a result of how the charter is written, there are limited structural options for the Council to consider in addressing constituent services. DSG understands, however, the Council's need to remain influential in responding to constituents. To this end, DSG conducted both academic and anecdotal research, assessing cities throughout the country that will provide San Diego with examples of how other cities' legislative bodies manage constituent services. Our goal is to recommend strategies within the existing structure that will most effectively and efficiently allow the Council to address their constituents' needs.

The following report describes in greater detail the methodology used; case studies or "portfolios" of cities that have unique solutions to constituent services and recommendations.

The report is organized into six primary sections:

- I. Recommendations
- II. Purpose and Scope of Work
- III. Methodology
- IV. Comparative Analysis (Table)

- V. Portfolios
 - A. Los Angeles;
 - B. New York;
 - C. Richmond; and
 - D. San Francisco
- VI. Conclusion

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council-Mayor form of government, as determined by the charter, separates the executive and legislative powers of government. When powers are separated the result is a system of checks and balances intended to serve the public good. Under the new form of government those officials who spend public funds are checked by officials who appropriate public funds and those who set law are checked by those who execute law. This redistribution of responsibility and power is a significant change the Council must face as it transitions, especially as it relates to constituent services.

While the city bureaucracy may remain just as committed to fulfilling the needs and requests of Council's constituents, the structural and organizational relationship between the Council and the administration will be different after January 1, 2006 when the City begins the new form of governance. Nonetheless, it is important to note that in none of the cities that DSG researched did Council Members feel that the Council-Mayor system impeded their ability to achieve results for their constituents.

In addition to the checks and balances inherent in the Council-Mayor form of government, the role the Council plays in constituent services will ultimately depend on each Council Member's priorities. DSG therefore has four fundamental recommendations for the Council Members to consider in order to remain influential over constituent services:

- Council Members be provided a budget to hire constituent service and policy staff as the Member sees fit;
- Implement a monitoring system for constituent requests. This system should be accessible to both the Council and the city departments to track and review the administration's responsiveness to constituents. When the budget becomes available this system should some day be integrated with a city wide call center, or "311 system". Eventually all Council members should have on-line request forms that are also integrated with the 311 system;
- Establish a process in which the Citizens' Assistance Program Manager would provide quarterly reports to the Council Committee that oversees Neighborhood Services. This would provide an opportunity for the public to hear of constituent concerns within their communities; and the Council Members to publicly express their concern about any lack of constituent service effectiveness within their Council districts; and
- Establish, through the budget, liaison positions in certain, high priority departments whose sole purpose is to respond to Council requests.

II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF WORK

DSG was instructed to assist the Council in determining the role it will play regarding constituent services after it transitions to the new form of government.

III. METHODOLOGY

To give the City of San Diego a sense of how other City Councils manage constituent services, a number of cities and jurisdictions from across the United States were researched and four were chosen to highlight as case studies. But first, DSG wanted to better understand how the City of San Diego currently manages constituent services.

DSG worked with Citizens' Assistance Program Manager Donna Cottingham, to understand San Diego's organizational structure relating to constituent services. This understanding is outlined below.

Under the existing organizational structure of the City of San Diego, the function of constituent services is administered through the Citizens' Assistance Program (CAP). It is the mission of the Citizens' Assistance Program "to provide prompt, comprehensive responses to Mayor, City Council, and public inquiries; and to provide ombudsman services with courtesy, competence, and concern."

The Citizens' Assistance Program handles constituent requests using a number of different means. First, CAP runs the City Information Center at City Hall that responds to walk-in visitors and thousands of phone calls. Of the 70,000 annual calls and thousands of visitors, listed below are some of the most frequently asked questions:

- "What number do I call to report a pothole?"
- "My neighbor's yard has too many weeds."
- "Where do I get a marriage license?"
- "What Council District do I live in?"
- "What do I need to start a business?"

The numbers of calls and visitors fluctuate with the seasons and as various issues surrounding the region arise. Secondly, CAP administers the Citywide Route Slip Tracking System and the Assignment Information Management (AIM) System for responses to public inquiries, complaints, and service requests directed to the City's legislative officials and the City Manager. This Program also performs ombudsman services by investigating complaints made by citizens, tracking City Council priorities, and providing quarterly updates to the Mayor and City Council on Council priorities. In Fiscal Year 2005, Citizens' Assistance provided responses to about 5,000 inquiries.

CAP is currently a program of the City Manager's Office. The CAP Manager's office is physically located on the same floor as the City Council and Council staff. This arrangement allows for an accessible, effective, and efficient flow of information associated with constituent complaints and concerns, as well as for status updates.

There are a variety of ways in which the Mayor and Council offices process constituent inquiries, complaints and service requests. The Program Manager initially receives the complaint from the elected official, reviews the complaint and forwards the complaint to the appropriate departments for a response. Council Representatives are active in their respective Districts attending community meetings and responding to phone calls and they are expected to respond to matters raised by their constituents. In two Council offices, there is a Council Representative who is solely responsible for creation of route slips within their Council District. Therefore, other Council Representatives within their office will forward the complaints to that one individual for follow-up. In other Council Offices, the entire staff can create route slips. The Mayor's Office has Council Representatives for each Council District who create route slips. Council offices and the Mayor's office have the option to forward complaints to the Citizens' Assistance Program Manager electronically as well. A constituent database keeps track of constituent complaints for each Council District. This tracking system will remain in place following the transition.

Additionally, each department or large division within a department has appointed a key liaison for route slips. The Citizens' Assistance Program creates a biweekly report of outstanding Route Slips and AIMS for the respective jurisdiction of the Mayor and each Council office.

A new web-based system, "Complete Gov", is currently being introduced into Council offices to electronically create and monitor constituent requested records as they are generated by the Council Offices. Also, a web-based complaint form is under development and will be posted on the Citizens' Assistance Program website for the public to fill out themselves.

The current San Diego City Charter's non-interference clause in section 22(b), which was amended slightly by Proposition F states that:

"Except for the purpose of inquiry, the Council and its members shall deal with that part of the administrative service for which the City Manager is responsible solely through the City Manager or his designated representative and not through his subordinates."

The Citizens' Assistance Program Manager is the City Manager's designee responsible for receiving, assigning, and ensuring follow through on requests for information and/or citizen requests for service routed from Mayor and Council staffs, as well as for direct inquiries or complaints from citizens. In compliance with Charter section 22, the Program Manager serves as the liaison between the City Manager's Office and staff of the Mayor and City Council. Additionally, the CAP Program Manager serves as the City Manager's administrative liaison to the San Diego County Grand Jury; organizes briefings on city operations for visiting public officials and other national and international visitors; and supervises administrative staff.

Under the new Mayor-Council form of governance and as stated in Proposition F, the Mayor is granted the authority, power, and responsibilities formerly conferred upon the City Manager. Therefore, CAP will become an Executive Branch function.

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

DSG looked at four cities, each with unique solutions to how their Council resolves constituent needs. They include:

- Los Angeles has a centralized service tracking system, department liaisons and a district-only discretionary fund that can be used to respond to constituent requests;
- New York has district field offices where Council staff work on constituent services full time;
- Richmond has recently transitioned to a Council-Mayor form of government and has a highly integrated tracking system accessed by both Council Member staffs and the bureaucracy; and
- San Francisco has board liaisons with departments.

Many if not most cities allow individual Council members to determine their own protocol for handling constituent services. To avoid duplicating the various models, DSG eliminated cities that have similar processes to the ones that were selected. For instance Fresno has a centralized tracking system that is similar to, but not as streamlined as Richmond's. Additionally, cities that have at-large elections were eliminated because the nature of representation is so different from San Diego's geographically based system.

The table below provides a comparative snapshot of other cities' Council size and staff size relative to city population in addition to constituent service options. Detailed information on each of the cities follows in the "portfolios" section.

Function	San Diego	Los Angeles	New York	Richmond	San Francisco
Population	1,223,400	3,694,820	8,008,278	197,790	776,733
Number of Council Members	9	15	51	9	11
Constituents per Council District	152,925	246,321	157,025	21,977	70,612
Council staff size	8-9	15-20	7-8	1	2
Has centralized constituent services tracking	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Has liaisons in the departments	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Has district field offices	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

V. PORTFOLIOS

The portfolios detailed below are specific to anecdotal responses DSG received regarding Councils' role in constituent services.

A. LOS ANGELES

Every Council Member in Los Angeles deals with constituent services differently. While some Members place greater importance on responding to constituent concerns, other Members choose to have their staff focus more on policy issues. For instance, one Council Member whose staff DSG spoke to allocates more staff, approximately 55-60%, to her district offices rather than the main downtown office in order to be more responsive to constituent needs. The field staff for this Member is structured into "deputies" that cover specific geographic areas. The same Member also has a policy whereby her staff has to respond to a constituent call the

same day it is received. When asked why this policy existed, staff stated that as a result of term limits, a number of Members are newer to elected office and tend to be more involved with the community. They also have greater political ambitions and see constituent-responsiveness as a key to winning voters as they seek to run for higher office. Conversely, other Members that have served on the Council for many years and were not first elected in the new term limit environment, tend to be less focused on constituent services and more focused on policy and legislation, particularly if they are being termed-out.

The process for recording and meeting constituent requests also depends on the Member's office. For example, in one office, any constituent call that is received is entered into an internal district database specific to that Member's office, so that it can be followed up on and monitored in the appropriate manner. Citywide, once a request is received; all Council Members and staff have access to an internal citywide database where they can submit a request, either via e-mail or fax, directly to the Supervisor in the department that corresponds to the request. The staff member then serves as a liaison between the department and constituent until the issue is resolved. More detailed and involved constituent requests, such as closing a street, are assigned to field deputies within the Member's office that manage the request.

Each Council Member's office is also given a special fund, called the General City Purpose Fund (GCP) that he/she can spend on their district in a number of ways, including in response to constituent requests. Specifically, the GCP is a lump sum of money given to each Member to spend on their district at their discretion. Some Members DSG spoke to spend this money on additional staff members while others use it to support local non-profits in their districts or to respond to constituent requests. The amount of money given to the Member depends on the budget situation for a given year. In better budget times, the GCP allocations have been up to \$100,000 per district; however, in recent years the GCP allocations have been \$25,000 per district. The GCP is referred to by one newspaper in the city as the Council's "slush fund", although the staff member we spoke to said that the offices have strict rules on how they can spend the money and are extra cautious since they know it is an area that the press likes to investigate.

Los Angeles also has a citywide 311-service that was instituted by the Mayor. When a Los Angeles resident calls 311 from any cell phone or land line, he/she is connected to a trained operator that refers the person to the appropriate office or department. The 311 service is viewed positively by the people DSG spoke to; however, as it becomes more widely used and successful, one staffer commented that the city will have to make sure there are enough trained operators to cover the increased demand.

In situations where a city department is unresponsive to a constituent request, a Council Member can introduce a motion that directs the department to look into the request. A Council staffer also commented that since Members vote on department budgets, department staffers tend to be responsive to requests since Members approve their budgets. The few exceptions that occur are generally when the Mayor disagrees, resulting in a political fight over the issue.

B. NEW YORK

New York was chosen as a case study because it has a Council-Mayor form of government, district elections, is one of the largest cities in the U.S., has a 311 system and district offices where staff are dedicated to case work.

In New York, Councilors have 3-4 staff who work in their City Hall office. These staff members focus primarily on policy work. Another 3-4 staff are in the Councilors' district office(s), where their primary responsibility is case work, or constituent services.

When a constituent calls their Councilor in New York, their case is assigned to an individual staff member based on the nature of the problem. Many staff members in New York spoke of the importance of specialization. Having staff who are dedicated to housing, or senior citizens or utilities and handling constituent requests in these areas vastly improves their efficiency.

Since New York has a 311 system, constituents are often, depending on the nature of the problem, directed by their assigned Council staff person to call the 311 system. However, for the New York Councilors who prioritize constituent services, they ask their constituents to call their office immediately after calling 311 and provide Council their ten-digit case number. Once the Council office has the case number, they can begin working from the inside – using their relationships and knowledge of the system – on behalf of the constituent. All Council staff that spoke to DSG believe this speeds up the process of getting the constituent's request filled.

Ultimately, like in San Diego, the executive bureaucracy has control over actually fulfilling the constituent requests. In New York, most city agencies have an intergovernmental staff member who is responsible for interfacing with the Council offices. In agencies that don't have an official intergovernmental staff member, someone in that agency becomes the "default" staffer who becomes the point person for Council offices to work with. In other words, they have functioning department liaisons similar to what DSG recommends for San Diego. Also like in San Diego, these positions are the domain of the Mayor. It is up to the individual agencies to hire and direct them.

Council staff in New York generally gave this system of agency liaisons favorable reviews, although, as one staff member stated, the efficiency of this system depends on the agency and the quality of the liaison. One staff person reassured DSG that agency slowness to respond was almost always a function of workload or institutional efficiency, and not political retribution.

C. RICHMOND

Richmond, Virginia was selected as a case study because it transitioned to a Council-Mayor form of government in 2003. The relative newness of the transition made this city a good comparison for San Diego. Additionally, the city has a highly centralized mechanism for handling constituent services city-wide.

Each Member of the Richmond City Council has a designated staff member called a Council Liaison charged with handling constituent requests. These are appointed, at-will employees. The city has a centralized data base where all requests from constituents are recorded. A constituent might have their request logged into the system one of three ways:

- The citizen could fill out an on-line request form;
- S/he could call the executive citizen's assistance center; or
- S/he could call their Council Member's liaison.

Regardless of the method the constituent uses, the request is entered into the system generating a work order for the proper city department. The city department responsible for handling the request posts an estimate on the length of time the request is likely to take.

Basic information regarding the status of a request can be accessed by the constituent, the Council Liaison, or bureaucracy employees. However, bureaucracy employees have the most access to this tracking system. More detailed and specific notes are not available to the Council Liaison and only the most basic information is available to the constituent. One liaison suggested that her lack of access can be problematic. For instance if a department transfers a request to another unit, the work order is closed and then regenerated, but this is not noted in the original case file. In general the system seems to work very well. According to staff, citizens always have their needs attended to by the bureaucracy.

D. SAN FRANCISCO

The Board of Supervisors in San Francisco approach constituent services similar to other cities DSG researched, and benefits from having liaisons in certain departments. The liaisons are responsible for addressing constituent needs that are directed through Board offices. The liaison positions are part of the executive branch, but generated through the Board during budget process. The aides from Supervisors' offices expressed their appreciation for having official liaisons with some of the departments. These aides believe that the turn around time for resolving constituent needs is 30% faster than if a constituent calls departments directly, because of the relationship with the liaison. In fact, the Mayor's Senior Advisor, formerly the Mayor's aide when the Mayor was a Supervisor, said that one of the most important persons involved in constituent services is the liaison to the Board.

Each of the Supervisors and aides DSG spoke to in San Francisco were in agreement that every office manages constituent services differently. While the Mayor has an office of neighborhood services that includes liaisons for each district in addition to central staff, there is no formal or single approach a constituent takes in addressing his/her needs. For the Supervisors, some offices devote more staff time to policy and in others more staff is dedicated to constituent services. There was also general agreement that "money is power", referring to the Supervisors role in the budget process and its impact on departments.

One district in San Francisco that generally requires more public works and safety services than other districts elected a Supervisor who has a positive, proactive approach with departments. Each year during budget considerations, this Supervisor and her staff reach out to departments and ask for their priorities. For example, although the public works department's budget may be cut, the Supervisor contacts the department and asks for their priorities of what they absolutely cannot do without; to try and make sure "they are taken care of". This Supervisorial office believes that having an open dialogue around the budget fosters a positive relationship with departments that helps their constituents' needs be met throughout the year.

VI. CONCLUSION

Due to how the City of San Diego's charter is written, the Council will be limited in terms of structural options in dealing with constituent services after the transition to the Council-Mayor form of government on January 1, 2006. There is no one straightforward answer that will allow the Council to influence constituent services in the same manner in which it currently operates. The role the Council plays in constituent services will ultimately depend on each Council Member's priorities and augmented by the new checks and balances – implementation of a monitoring system, quarterly reports to the Council and department liaisons, as described in our recommendations.